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Chair: Mr. García González ..... (El Salvador)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Agenda item 51: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*) (A/68/13; A/68/13/Add.1; A/68/388; A/68/347; A/68/343 and A/68/335)

1. **Ms. Sughayar** (Jordan) said that only about 20 per cent of the budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was allocated to her country, even though it hosted more than 40 per cent of all Palestine refugees. Each year, her Government spent more than the Agency's total annual budget to provide those refugees in its country with a wide range of services, including health care, education and social welfare. More than 1.3 million people, including thousands of displaced Palestine refugees, had fled to Jordan from the Syrian Arab Republic in recent years, placing an almost unbearable strain on her country's economy and infrastructure. Her Government was therefore deeply concerned about the Agency's financial crisis and urged the international community to increase its financial and political support to ensure the Agency's long-term sustainability.

2. Until a long-term political solution was found to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, providing UNRWA with the financial resources it needed to fulfil its mandate was essential to partially alleviating the financial burden on countries hosting Palestine refugees. Jordan's provision of services to the Palestine refugees must not be used as a pretext to halt any increase in the budget for UNRWA operations in Jordan to reflect the growth in its Palestine refugee population. Jordan fully supported all endeavours to conclude a long-term peace accord between Israelis and Palestinians that addressed all final-status issues, including the refugees. In that regard, it stood firm on the refugees' right of return to their homes and their right to compensation, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III) and other United Nations resolutions.

3. **Mr. Sharoni** (Israel) said that, although his country supported the humanitarian mission of UNRWA and recognized the Agency's important contribution to the welfare of Palestine refugees and their descendants, it strongly opposed its political agenda. In their haste to accuse Israel of injustice, certain States were unable to understand that the true injustice being perpetrated was the politicization of the Palestinian refugee issue. Palestine refugees had their own set of rules, their own funding and their own United Nations agency. They enjoyed life-long privileges and were provided with numerous benefits, including free health care and education, even if they no longer lived in refugee camps.

4. Uniquely among refugee populations, the Palestine refugees did not lose their refugee status if they became citizens of another State, and were allowed to transfer that status to their children. As a result, their numbers had ballooned to over 5 million. However, if they were counted using the standards established by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, that figure would drop to fewer than 50,000. The Palestine refugees were therefore being counted using double standards that promoted the Palestinian leadership's so-called "right of return" for millions of Palestinians. That idea, deliberately perpetuated and reinforced among Palestinian children from the moment they started school, was a non-starter and the single greatest obstacle to peace, defying both basic logic and arithmetic.

5. Although the region was awash in petrodollars, available funds mysteriously dried up when the time came to assist the Palestinians and the Agency. The list of the Agency's ten largest donor countries did not include a single Arab or Muslim country. Those countries seemed to believe that the existence of UNRWA absolved them of any responsibility towards the Palestine refugees. Although the budget of UNRWA was under strain, it must be remembered that the Agency was perpetuating the refugee status of those Palestinians instead of encouraging their reintegration into society. Furthermore, as its mandate no longer included resettlement, the Agency would always need additional funds as the Palestinian refugee population grew. Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership was using the refugees as political pawns rather than working to improve their lives.

6. Israel was doing its utmost to facilitate UNRWA operations, going to great lengths to extend humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people while fostering conditions for their economic growth. Its working relationship with the Agency's West Bank Field Office had also improved. In 2012, over 57,500 trucks had entered Gaza from Israel, many carrying construction materials for projects funded by the international community. Regrettably, however, those materials were often used for illegitimate purposes:

instead of building houses, Hamas was building smuggling tunnels, and instead of building schools, it was building terror networks. In that connection, a recently discovered terror tunnel from Gaza into Israel had been built using 500 tons of cement that had been earmarked for construction projects. Yet, many of the delegations that had made an emotional appeal on behalf of the Palestinians had not uttered a single word criticising them for such acts. It was time to stop making destructive statements against Israel and to amend the Agency's politicized mandate, which was perpetuating the Palestinian refugee issue and undermining efforts to achieve lasting peace.

7. **Mr. Al-Kuwari** (Qatar), expressing his Government's condolences to the families of all UNRWA staff who had lost their lives while carrying out their duties and commending all UNRWA staff for the efforts they made, often at great personal risk, said that the Agency's services were indispensable for improving the lives of Palestinians, and that its work promoted stability in the region as a whole. Qatar was therefore deeply concerned about the Agency's chronic budget deficit, which had been exacerbated by the crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic, where 90 per cent of Palestine refugees required urgent assistance and many UNRWA schools and health-care facilities had been destroyed. Israel was also imposing increasingly harsh measures on Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, particularly in Gaza, where the humanitarian situation continued to worsen as a result of its ongoing blockade. Israel's denial of the Palestinians' inalienable right to return to their homes was undermining any possibility of a peaceful resolution to the question of Palestine. The Government of Qatar had doubled its contribution to the Agency and would continue to strongly support the Palestine refugees, both morally and financially. It urged all Member States to provide adequate financial assistance to UNRWA to enable it to carry out its mandate effectively.

8. **Mr. Yang** Zhiyu (China) commended the dedication of UNRWA staff, who often worked in very difficult circumstances to provide vital humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees. His Government urged Israel to lift the blockade of the Gaza Strip, which was causing great suffering among Palestinian civilians, and to facilitate access to goods, humanitarian relief and construction materials so that people living there could live normal and dignified lives. His delegation was deeply concerned about the funding shortfall of UNRWA, the threats to the personal safety and security of its staff and the restrictions on their movement. The Government of China had contributed to UNRWA for over 30 years, as testimony to its support for the Palestinian people and the work of the Agency, and would be increasing that support so that UNRWA could continue to fulfil its mandate.

9. **Mr. Eler** (Turkey) said that UNRWA faced many challenges in fulfilling its mandate, including the growing refugee population, the ongoing crisis in Syria, which had displaced half the Palestine refugees resident in that country, and the continuing illegal blockade of Gaza. He commended the courageous efforts of UNRWA staff working in highly dangerous situations and expressed his condolences to the families of those staff members who had been killed while carrying out their duties. A strong and financially sound UNRWA contributed to stability in the Middle East. However, the Agency faced a budgetary shortfall of over $48 million, which posed a serious risk to all its operations.

10. Turkey had always supported UNRWA financially and had increased its contribution to the Agency in recent years. It was also sending 10,000 tons of flour to Gaza through the Agency in 2013. He urged all States to fully support UNRWA, in particular, by contributing to the Syria Humanitarian Assistance Response Plan. His Government would continue to support the Palestinian people until a just and sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was found. Welcoming the recent resumption of peace talks, he urged the parties to the conflict to avoid actions that could jeopardize the achievement of the two-State solution, in accordance with relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid principles, the Quartet road map and the Arab Peace Initiative.

11. **Ms. Bafetanye** (Botswana) said that her country had consistently expressed its support for the people of Palestine and Syria. Their suffering, particularly that of women and children, could no longer be ignored and urgent steps must be taken to alleviate it. In that connection, her delegation deeply appreciated the Agency's efforts to continue to provide assistance to the Palestine refugees, despite the financial challenges it faced. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict could only be resolved on the basis of the two-State-solution. The establishment of a sovereign State of Palestine, coexisting side by side with Israel, would significantly

improve the lives of Israelis and Palestinians and foster regional peace and stability. Botswana warmly welcomed the resumption of peace negotiations between Israel and Palestine and encouraged the parties to negotiate in good faith and to stand ready to make compromises with a view to achieving a lasting solution to the conflict.

12. **Mr. Klein** (United States of America) commended UNRWA for providing essential humanitarian support to more than five million Palestine refugees, striving to uphold their human rights and promoting tolerance and non-violence in its schools. Regrettably, conflict was affecting all five UNRWA fields of operation and a number of Agency staff members had lost their lives as a result of violence in 2013. The United States remained particularly concerned about the devastating impact that the conflict in Syria was having on Palestinian refugee communities and urged all parties to that conflict to respect the civilian nature of refugee camps and allow humanitarian assistance to reach those in need.

13. The United States remained the largest bilateral donor to UNRWA and was contributing more than $294 million in 2013, including $135 million to the Agency's core budget and $159 million to support emergency relief and reconstruction activities in Gaza, the West Bank, Syria and Lebanon. It commended the generosity of certain countries and the commitments of members of the League of Arab States to achieve and sustain the 7.8 per cent target for their contributions to the Agency's General Fund, but was concerned that the Agency would be unable to continue providing critical humanitarian assistance to the Palestine refugees unless steps were taken to address its chronic budgetary shortfall. Donors must ensure the long-term financial stability of the Agency and provide it with the resources it needed to carry out its mandate. The United States looked forward to working with UNRWA, host Governments and other donors to ensure that that issue was addressed, including in the context of the Agency's next medium-term strategy.

14. **Mr. Fernandes** (Brazil) said that UNRWA had made an outstanding contribution to relieving the plight of the Palestine refugees and enhancing their living conditions for more than 60 years. His Government was deeply concerned about Israel's ongoing settlement-building activity in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, but welcomed the resumption of direct final-status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, which he hoped would result in the establishment of a Palestinian State on the basis of the June 1967 borders. The Israeli blockade of Gaza was causing great suffering among the Palestine refugees and the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Syria, which affected all Syrians and Palestine refugees in that country, had placed the economies and infrastructure of Jordan and Lebanon under severe strain.

15. Despite those challenges, UNRWA continued to make a significant contribution to stability in the Middle East. The international community must therefore continue to provide the Agency with both financial and political support so that it could continue to carry out its operations. In that connection, Brazil warmly welcomed the commitments of members of the League of Arab States to achieve and sustain their 7.8 per cent target of contributions to the Agency's core budget. It was strengthening and expanding the scope of its cooperation with UNRWA and was a stakeholder in several relevant bilateral and multilateral initiatives, including the India-Brazil-South Africa Trust Fund, and had also concluded an agreement with UNRWA and the World Food Programme to donate 11,500 tons of rice, worth approximately $5.5 million, as food aid for Palestine refugees assisted by the Agency.

16. **Mr. White** (Australia) said that his country had been the twelfth-largest donor to UNRWA in 2012 and had been supporting its operations for over 60 years, in order to lay the foundations for improved security and stability in the Middle East region. The Agency's focus on education and health was a vital investment in the human capital essential for building any future Palestinian State. In 2012, half a million children had attended UNRWA schools, three million Palestinians had been able to consult a medical officer at 139 UNRWA clinics, about 176,000 children had been vaccinated, and 290,000 of the poorest Palestinians had received food assistance through the Agency. As it struggled to address the humanitarian crisis in Syria, where over half the 529,000 Palestine refugees registered with the Agency there had been displaced from their homes and eight staff members had been killed, UNRWA continued to suffer from persistent funding shortfalls.

17. His delegation commended the Agency's efforts to enhance its efficiency, negotiate tax exemptions with

the Palestinian Authority and reduce its expenditure, including by limiting salary increases. It encouraged UNRWA to continue making optimal use of its limited financial resources and urged host countries, donors and refugees to work together to develop a measurable and achievable medium-term strategy for 2016-2021 that addressed the Agency's acute financial difficulties. Australia strongly supported the resumption of final-status negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians aimed at reaching a just and lasting two-State solution, with Israel and a Palestinian State living side by side in peace and security within internationally recognized borders.

18. **Mr. Bosah** (Nigeria) said that the civil war and humanitarian crisis in Syria and the deteriorating economic and political situation in the Agency's fields of operation were severely affecting its ability to fulfil its mandate. UNRWA had also been forced to cut key programmes because of its chronic financial deficit. For UNRWA to continue providing high-quality services to the Palestine refugees, the international community must provide it with financial support that was commensurate with its needs and that took into account the growing Palestinian refugee population. His Government warmly welcomed the easing by Israel of certain restrictions on Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza and its release of a number of Palestinian prisoners, but reiterated its appeal to Israel to remove all restrictions on the movement of people and goods into Gaza, which caused great hardship for the civilian population. Although UNRWA continued to play a key role in promoting stability in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, a long-term solution to the Palestinian refugee issue could only be achieved as part of a permanent settlement to the Middle East conflict. Nigeria therefore welcomed efforts by the United States to kick-start the peace talks and urged the parties involved to seize that opportunity to achieve a settlement.

19. **Mr. Selim** (Egypt) said that UNRWA would remain an indispensable United Nations entity until the Palestine refugees could fully exercise their inalienable rights, including their right to return to their homes and their right to fair compensation for the suffering they had endured. His delegation commended UNRWA for its ongoing efforts to alleviate the refugees' plight. The inhabitants of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, continued to suffer as a result of Israel's systematic violations of international humanitarian and human rights law and United Nations resolutions. Israel should therefore end its punitive measures, including the blockade it had imposed on the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, and comply fully with all relevant United Nations resolutions. International financial institutions and UNRWA donors must take urgent action to address the Agency's chronic budgetary shortfall, as the members of the League of Arab States had done with their pledge to achieve and sustain their level of contributions to the Agency's core budget.

20. **Mr. Taguri** (Libya) said that UNRWA provided a sense of hope to the five million Palestine refugees who struggled to live with dignity on a daily basis. It was therefore of great concern that, as it sought to address the needs of a growing refugee population in an unstable region, the Agency was facing a chronic budgetary deficit. Additional resources were urgently needed to ensure that UNRWA could continue to fulfil its mandate. In that connection, Libya commended the steps the Agency was taking to enhance its efficiency but condemned the arbitrary and oppressive Israeli restrictions on the movement of its personnel and vehicles, as well as the attacks by Israeli forces on United Nations facilities, which had severely affected the Agency's ability to carry out its operations.

21. To resolve the question of Palestine, the root causes of the conflict must be addressed, namely Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and its settlement-building programme, which had accelerated dramatically in recent years, particularly following the admission of the State of Palestine to the United Nations as a non-member observer State. The international community must compel Israel to comply with all relevant United Nations resolutions and ensure that the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people were upheld, including their rights to self-determination and to an independent sovereign State, with East Jerusalem as its capital. Israel must immediately halt all settlement construction and other illegal practices, including the destruction of Palestinian homes, the construction of the separation wall and its blockade of the Gaza Strip

22. **Mr. al-Mahmoud** (United Arab Emirates) said that his delegation was concerned about the increasingly harsh social and humanitarian situation facing the Palestine refugees. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, the occupying Power had targeted Palestinians and their property, disrupted the

programmes of UNRWA and damaged its facilities. The Lebanese and Jordanian authorities were finding it increasingly difficult to absorb the large numbers of refugees fleeing the violence in Syria. Furthermore, the Agency was struggling to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestine refugees in Syria because many remained trapped in camps that had been largely destroyed by the ongoing conflict. The international community must impress on all relevant stakeholders that it was vital to protect Palestinian refugee communities and ensure that they received UNRWA assistance. Every effort must also be made to ensure the safety and security of UNRWA staff. Israel must immediately end its blockade of Gaza and all settlement-building activity, land confiscations, house demolitions and the expulsion of Palestinian families, particularly in East Jerusalem. A just solution to the Palestinian question must include the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and to receive compensation for the tremendous moral and financial losses they had sustained.

23. The Agency's chronic budget deficit was severely impeding its ability to provide services and emergency assistance to the growing Palestinian refugee population. His Government, which would continue to contribute $1.7 million annually to UNRWA, warmly welcomed the commitment by the members of the League of Arab States to achieve and sustain their contributions target, and commended his country's Red Crescent Authority's donation of $500,000 to help the Agency alleviate the plight of the Palestine refugees in Syria.

24. **Mr. Pedersen** (Norway) said that inflation, the growing Palestine refugee population, a chronic financial deficit and political instability and violence in its fields of operation were severely impeding the ability of UNRWA to fulfil its mandate. To address the challenges it faced, the Agency must enhance its fundraising efforts and service delivery, and forge stronger partnerships with host countries, other United Nations agencies and the private sector. It must also adapt to changing realities in the region and give priority to the most vulnerable refugee groups. Norway encouraged the Agency to address sustainability and prioritization in its medium-term strategy for 2016-2021, and strongly supported its efforts to enhance transparency and accountability in its operations. It was unreasonable to expect a small group of major donors to continue to provide the lion's share of the Agency's funds. Norway therefore welcomed contributions and commitments made by new donors as well as the increased contributions promised by some traditional donors.

25. **Mr. Al-Alati** (Kuwait) said that Israel, the occupying Power, bore primary responsibility for the tragic situation of the Palestine refugees. It had systematically destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and continued to violate the Palestinian people's most fundamental human rights. In the West Bank, tighter restrictions had been placed on the movement of people, goods and services; unemployment and food insecurity were increasing; and Palestinian families had been forcefully expelled from their homes by Israeli settlers. The international community must therefore compel Israel to abide by all relevant Security Council resolutions and lift its blockade of Gaza. The Agency's financial crisis was a source of great concern. Kuwait remained fully committed to UNRWA, increasing its contribution to $2 million in 2011. It reaffirmed its solidarity with the Palestinian people and its support for their inalienable rights, as affirmed in United Nations resolutions.

26. **Mr. Haniff** (Malaysia) said that the security and political and economic situations were deteriorating in all five of the Agency's fields of operation. Violent clashes and the shelling of UNRWA camps had adversely affected whole refugee communities. More than two thirds of the Palestine refugees in Syria had been displaced from their homes and many had fled to Jordan and Lebanon, placing further demands on those countries' already overburdened infrastructure. In the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel had accelerated its illegal settlement-building programme, demolished at least 600 Palestinian-owned structures, and was building a separation wall that further aggravated the humanitarian situation. Indeed, the deliberate steps taken by the occupying Power against the Palestinians threatened their very survival as a people. His Government condemned Israel's ongoing restrictions on the movement of UNRWA staff members and goods in the West Bank and Gaza, which undermined the Agency's ability to carry out its mandate and constituted a flagrant violation of the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, relevant United Nations resolutions and the Charter of the United Nations. The international community must therefore compel the occupying Power to fully comply with international legal instruments, including the

agreement between the Agency and the Government of Israel.

27. Malaysia was one of the staunchest supporters of the Palestinian cause and the work of UNRWA. It had contributed $1.2 million to the Agency in 2012 and was contributing $250,000 in 2013 to help it improve the situation of the refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. However, the Agency's budget shortfall was adversely affecting its ability to support the almost five million Palestine refugees who depended on its services. Although its efforts to identify priorities and expand its donor base were laudable, it was deeply worrying that certain States were reducing their financial assistance to the Agency. UNRWA was a potent symbol of the international community's commitment towards the Palestine refugees. Member States therefore had a shared responsibility to provide the Agency with the financial support it required to fulfil its mandate.

28. **Mr. Al-Zayani** (Bahrain) commended UNRWA for its many achievements over the years and the vital role it had played in supporting Palestinians' aspirations for a better life. The Palestinian refugee issue had arisen because of the non-implementation of key United Nations resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which enshrined the right of the Palestine refugees to return to their homes and properties. Regrettably, however, Israeli measures were hindering the Agency's work and making life for Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory increasingly difficult, as noted in the reports of the Commissioner-General (A/68/13 and A/68/13/Add.1). UNRWA faced a deepening financial crisis and, despite the reforms it was undertaking to enhance its effectiveness, was finding it increasingly difficult to fulfil its mandate. The shortfall in its budget was hampering its ability to undertake those vital reforms. Given sufficient resources, he was confident that the Agency would be able to overcome its challenges and continue to provide services to Palestine refugees until a comprehensive solution to the conflict was achieved.

29. **Mr. Momen** (Bangladesh) said that his delegation greatly appreciated the continuing efforts by UNRWA to provide efficient, quality services to Palestine refugees. While he had full confidence in the Agency's ability to fulfil its humanitarian and human development mandates, he had grave concerns about the security of its staff, despite repeated calls to host country authorities to ensure their safety. Furthermore, UNRWA should be provided with information on its detained staff, and restrictions that hindered the Agency's activities and movements should be lifted, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations.

30. The international community must focus more on the situation of the Palestine refugees in Syria, many of whom had been displaced from their homes by the violence and no longer had access to essential services and could not afford basic commodities. His Government urged all parties to the conflict to take all possible steps to protect those refugees. It also urged Israel to remove all restrictions on the movement of goods, services and people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, to take urgent steps to prevent all acts of violence against Palestinians and to immediately halt all settlement expansion and the confiscation of their property and natural resources.

31. **Mr. Pham** Quang Hieu (Viet Nam) said that his Government commended UNRWA for its efforts to continue to deliver its programmes and enhance its effectiveness. The United Nations, Member States and the international donor community must continue to support the work of the Agency. His delegation remained concerned about the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process, the volatile situation in the Gaza Strip and the fate of the Palestine refugees. In the light of the level of poverty, food insecurity and dependence on international aid described in the Agency's reports (A/68/13 and A/68/13/Add.1), and given the fact that Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, settlement construction and expansion, home demolitions and other practices were affecting the entire Palestinian civilian population and impeding the work of UNRWA, his Government called upon the occupying Power to cease all military and settlement activities, end its blockade of Gaza and provide immediate protection for the Palestinian population there, in accordance with international humanitarian law. UNRWA staff should also be allowed to perform their duties under suitable and safe conditions. Viet Nam reiterated its principled support for the courageous struggle and the rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to self-determination and to an independent State. His Government had recognized the State of Palestine from the very beginning and would support its legitimate request for membership in the United Nations.

32. **Mr. Singla** (India) said that UNRWA symbolized the international community's commitment to the well-being of the Palestine refugees pending the achievement of a just and durable settlement to the Middle East conflict. UNRWA carried out exemplary work under extremely difficult circumstances, especially in Syria, where it had provided emergency assistance to nearly 300,000 Palestine refugees. His delegation praised the Agency's commitment to enhancing its service delivery and the cost-effectiveness of its operations, and for its far-reaching reforms.

33. However, a chronic lack of funds was undermining the Agency's ability to fulfil its mandate. His delegation urged the international community to continue supporting UNRWA and the broader Palestinian cause. To that end, India had increased its annual contribution to UNRWA to $1 million, starting with the 2009-2010 financial year, and had contributed an additional $1 million in response to the Agency's flash appeal in 2010. It also contributed $10 million annually to the Palestinian Authority, provided training to Palestinian civil servants and, through the India-Brazil-South Africa Trust Fund, had undertaken several capacity-building and infrastructure projects that were a priority for the Palestinian Authority.

34. The ongoing blockade of Gaza and restrictions on movement in the West Bank were bringing severe hardship to the Palestinian population and hindering UNRWA operations. Israel should lift the blockade, facilitate the unimpeded movement of UNRWA staff so that they could carry out their duties, and allow ordinary people to resume their normal lives. Support for the Palestinian cause had been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. India strongly supported a negotiated solution to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians and the establishment of a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, existing within secure and recognized borders, side by side and at peace with Israel. His Government also endorsed Palestine's bid for full and equal membership in the United Nations.

35. **Mr. Al Salloom** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation was deeply grateful to the staff of UNRWA for the sacrifices they made and offered its condolences to the families of those who had lost their lives while carrying out their duties. The Palestinian refugee population was steadily increasing and UNRWA urgently required additional resources and staff to implement key programmes, establish health-care centres and build schools. Members of the international community must therefore increase their contributions to the Agency, particularly in the light of its funding shortfall of over $48 million. His Government had increased its financial contribution and pledged to remain one of the main contributors to UNRWA until the Palestinian people returned to their homes and received compensation for the suffering they had endured, in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

36. The illegal activities of Israel, particularly its ongoing settlement-building activities and its continued, unjustified blockade of Gaza, deserved the strongest possible condemnation. Saudi Arabia was deeply concerned that, in flagrant violation of United Nations resolutions, Israel had authorized the construction of another 1,500 housing units for Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem and a further 800 units on land between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The international community must compel Israel to comply with international law and refrain from unilateral actions that undermined the quest for peace and justice. All restrictive measures should be lifted immediately, and the racist separation wall that had been built on Palestinian land in the West Bank should be demolished. The political support of the international community was indispensable for the Palestinian people's struggle for justice. In that regard, Saudi Arabia urged Member States to support the admission of Palestine as a full member of the United Nations. The Israeli occupation was almost the only occupation remaining in the world. In the hope of bringing it to an end and promoting regional peace and security, the Government of Saudi Arabia had played and would continue to play an active contributory role in the peace process.

37. **Ms. Mwingira** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that her Government welcomed steps taken by the Agency to address its budget deficit and enhance the transparency and efficiency of its operations, including its efforts to expand its donor base and to address challenges related to the implementation of the International Public Sector Accounting Standards, particularly in connection with end-of-service liabilities. Her delegation commended those States that had made additional contributions to UNRWA in 2013 and encouraged others to increase their support to the Agency. Expressing condolences to the families of

UNRWA staff members killed in the line of duty, she emphasized her delegation's concern at the worsening security situation in Syria and its regional repercussions. She called on the international community to redouble its efforts to foster dialogue between the parties to the conflict, who should also take all possible steps to protect civilians, including the Palestine refugees.

38. **Mr. Koroma** (Sierra Leone) said that the international community's repeated failure to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was shameful. He thanked countries hosting Palestine refugees, who did not deserve the suffering they were enduring and were only asking to return to their homeland and build a successful Palestine State. He commended efforts to resume the peace talks and urged all stakeholders with influence in the region to work to ensure a successful outcome of those talks, as a peaceful, negotiated settlement was the only viable option for ending the conflict. However, Israel must stop violating the fundamental human rights of Palestinians in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, lift its blockade of Gaza and stop all settlement-building activity. At the same time, rocket attacks launched from the Occupied Palestinian Territory that killed innocent Israeli civilians must end, and the right of the people of Israel to exist as a nation must be respected.

39. His delegation was deeply concerned that UNRWA faced a budgetary shortfall of almost $50 million, which threatened the provision of vital services to Palestine refugees and undermined their faith in a better future. Member States should therefore ensure that the Agency had adequate financial support to continue to fulfil its mandate.

40. **Archbishop Chullikatt** (Observer for the Holy See) said that the Catholic Church, in collaboration with generous donors from around the world, provided education, health-care and social services for people in the Holy Land, and operated rehabilitation facilities for those injured as a result of conflict. All its services were provided on the basis of need rather than creed. Like UNRWA, the Church was a witness to the harsh realities facing people in the region and was gravely concerned that many Palestine refugees had lost their homes and jobs as a result of the ongoing crisis. Furthermore, increasing numbers of destitute Palestinian families were appealing to humanitarian organizations for assistance because their breadwinners had been debilitated, imprisoned or killed. Like UNRWA, the Church needed to raise additional funds to pay for services on which many of the region's most vulnerable people depended. However, shrinking Christian communities in the region where Christianity was born made it increasingly difficult for the Church to raise the funds it needed and many traditional donors were, themselves, under considerable financial pressure.

41. Peace between Israelis and Palestinians would facilitate economic investment in the region, relieving much of the financial burden that was shouldered by donor countries and humanitarian agencies. He hoped that the resumed peace process, which must address the status of Jerusalem, would facilitate a just and lasting solution to the conflict. His delegation urged the Quartet and all other concerned stakeholders to spare no effort in facilitating that process. It also hoped that the peace talks being held to discuss the situation in Syria would help bring an end to the crisis.

42. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner General of UNRWA) said that ongoing conflicts in the region and inadequate resources were severely affecting the ability of UNRWA to fulfil its mandate, including in Gaza, where it had been forced to reduce some of its humanitarian activities. Despite its limited resources, however, UNRWA would continue striving to provide universal access to health and education services to the Palestine refugees. He appealed for the required resources to be made available to allow the Agency to continue to provide those services. In that connection, he thanked countries that had announced that they would be making additional contributions to UNRWA, including Switzerland for financially supporting the Agency's efforts to expand its donor base, Japan for its initiative to have aid flows to Palestine and UNRWA from countries in East and Southeast Asia increased, and Brazil for promoting support for UNRWA in Latin America. Noting that Arab donor countries were, in fact, major donors to the Agency's non-regular budget, he urged the members of the League of Arab States to do their utmost to achieve the stated target for their contributions to the Agency's General Fund.

43. UNRWA would continue its advocacy on behalf of the Palestine refugees, not as a political statement, but in fulfilment of its mandate. UNRWA was not a political entity and had no political agenda. If adequate resources were made available, it would continue to implement the key reforms it had begun in 2006 and would endeavour to enhance its refugee protection

mechanisms. Protection was of particular relevance in the light of the events in the Syrian Arab Republic, where UNRWA had been unable to reach many refugees trapped in various refugee camps, and would constitute a key component of the Agency's medium-term strategy for 2016-2021. In that regard, he thanked the Syrian Government for facilitating access by UNRWA to some isolated Palestinian refugee communities.

44. He appealed for all humanitarian actors to be given access to Palestine refugees and other communities at risk in the Syrian Arab Republic; for neighbouring countries to keep their borders open to all civilians fleeing the violence in that country; and for those neighbouring countries to be supported financially so that they could more easily shoulder the huge burden that the Syrian refugee crisis was placing on their infrastructure and economies. A political solution, which must take into consideration the issue of the Palestine refugees, was very much needed so that all civilians in Syria could resume their normal lives and help rebuild their country.

45. In the Gaza Strip, the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate, with the number of Gazans who commuted daily to jobs in Israel as were the levels of imports and exports having been curtailed drastically, causing significant hardship for Gazan families. Indeed, during the reporting period, the Agency had been unable to import vital construction materials and had been forced to suspend 20 out of the 21 construction projects it was undertaking. While acknowledging the security concerns of Egypt and Israel, he emphasized that it was unacceptable for harsh security measures to be imposed on civilians who had in no way threatened those countries' security. The dire humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip must be urgently addressed, starting with a lifting of the blockade at the earliest opportunity.

46. Attempts to associate UNRWA with injustice were regrettable. If any injustice had been committed, it was the one that had been perpetrated against the Palestine refugees from the outset and one that must be addressed within the context of a negotiated solution. The Palestine refugees were not unique in having their children also recognized as refugees; other refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees were afforded a similar status. The only reason why the Palestine refugees could be said to have their own agency was that their situation arose prior to the establishment of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and it would have been impractical and politically difficult for that Office to assume responsibility for the Palestine refugees.

47. UNRWA remained committed to promoting peace and tolerance, including in its schools. In that regard, he was grateful to the United States of America for providing the lion's share of funds for school programmes on human rights, conflict resolution and tolerance. The Agency would continue to strive to ensure that its school curriculums upheld the values of the Organization. Claims that the Agency sought to keep refugees in a state of under-development were spurious. On the contrary, UNRWA provided refugees with key opportunities to improve their lives, as epitomized by the recent appointment of the Gazan singer Mohammed Assaf as its first goodwill ambassador for peace.

48. A political solution to the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis was an essential prerequisite for achieving peace in the Middle East region. He very much regretted stepping down as Commissioner-General before substantive progress towards that goal had been achieved; only a just and consultative solution to the question of Palestine could bring redress to the Palestine refugees for the historic injustice perpetrated against them.

Statements in exercise of the right of reply

49. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for the State of Palestine) said that she was shocked by the Israeli representative's assertion that the right of return of the Palestine refugees was a non-starter and an obstacle to peace. On the contrary, the refugee question was a final-status issue agreed upon by the parties. How could the denial of human rights, violations of international law and the perpetuation of the exile, dispossession and misery of a people serve the cause of peace? It could not. To put people before politics, as had been suggested by the Israeli representative, his country must first acknowledge the humanity of the Palestine refugees, the suffering it had inflicted on them and their right to justice. His callous remarks regarding the number of Palestine refugees were the height of hypocrisy. Although Israel continued to deny the Palestine refugees their right of return, it granted any Jewish person from anywhere in the world the right to return to Israel. When Member States had

adopted General Assembly resolution 181 partitioning historic Palestine, they had never envisaged the departure or removal of the indigenous Palestinian people and their perpetual dispossession. How would the international community react if, following the end of a conflict, another State refused the return of millions of people displaced in that conflict solely on the basis of their ethnicity or religion?

50. Despite the challenges they faced, the Palestinian people and their leadership remained committed to compromise and to peaceful coexistence with Israel, but peace could not be achieved unless international law was upheld. The Palestine refugee issue was one of justice, rights and humanitarian and political responsibility. Palestine was deeply grateful for the many statements made in support of the refugees, the humanitarian work of UNRWA and the overwhelming support of the General Assembly for resolutions in that regard. That long-standing principled support was the clear answer to Israel's immoral rejectionist stance and illogical arguments.

51. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his Government shared the concerns of many Member States with regard to the deteriorating security situation in his country and its impact on the Palestine refugees. It had strengthened its collaboration with UNRWA and was doing everything possible to protect Palestinians in the country and to ensure that they could continue to live in dignity. Although the Government treated the Palestine refugees and its citizens equally and strove to ensure that the refugees did not suffer discrimination in the workplace or in obtaining health-care and education services, armed groups had committed atrocities against the Palestinians and forced many of them to leave their homes. Furthermore, the imposition by some States of unilateral economic sanctions against Syria had significantly worsened the living conditions of both the Palestine refugees and Syrian nationals.

52. It was outrageous that the representative of the Israeli occupation authorities should feign concern for the Palestine refugees in Syria. The entire international community was fully aware that Israel had brutally expelled the Palestine refugees from their homes and continued to deny them the most fundamental human rights, including their right of return. Indeed, the great suffering of the Palestinian people was a consequence of Israel's utter disregard for United Nations resolutions, international law and standards of basic human decency.

53. **Mr. Sharoni** (Israel) said that Israel stood ready to make a historic compromise by accepting the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian State bordering the Jewish State of Israel. It was time to seize that opportunity and work to achieve a lasting solution rather than spread lies and foster hate. To resolve their differences, Israelis and Palestinians must negotiate on a basis of truth, mutual recognition and security. In contrast to Malaysia, where citizens were denied their right to due process, torture was widespread and religious freedom and freedom of speech were severely curtailed, Israel was a thriving, multicultural democracy in which the rights of minorities were respected and all religions tolerated

54. **Mr. Abdul Razak** (Malaysia) said that, since the topic under consideration was the work of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, which did not operate in Malaysia, the representative of Israel might want to take his complaints about Malaysia to a more appropriate forum.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.